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UNCLAS BANGKOK 007207

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SUBJECT: RALLIES AGAINST VIOLENCE HELD IN YALA AND

NARATHIWAT

REF: BANGKOK 7123

**¶11.** (U) Crowds estimated at 5,000 to 6,000 persons gathered in the southern provinces of Yala and Narathiwat on November 17 to protest the murder by suspected separatists of a former militant, who was cooperating with the government, and his family (reftel). The crowds were made up of both Thai Muslims and Buddhists. Press and academic contacts told the Embassy that most of the participants were from the provinces and had been organized by local district chiefs. The crowds heard speakers condemn the killings of police informant Sudeng Ahwaebuesa, his spouse and seven children in an attack in Narathiwat's Ra Ngae district on November 16.

**¶12.** (U) The biggest crowd, probably over 5,000 strong, gathered at the Municipal Youth Center, where representatives from Islamic student organizations, Muslim leadership councils and women's groups denounced the separatists. In Narathiwat, several hundred from Pattani province gathered to show solidarity with their neighbors. Expressions of support came from elsewhere. On the day of the rally Ayutthaya Islamic Committee Chairman Pradit Rattanakomol, on behalf of the Muslims in his district, condemned the slayings and announced that those who perpetrated the murders "answered to no religion." In Songkhla, the Chamber of Commerce has announced its intention to organize a peace march in Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat.

**¶13.** (SBU) Comment: The "bi-partisan" Buddhist-Muslim makeup of the crowds is encouraging in light of apparent recent attempts by separatists to drive a wedge between these two communities in the region. Whether this will discourage hard-core separatists from making similar attacks in the future, however, is debatable.

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